

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte, Doctor



*My office hours are any and all hours
of the day and night.*

1 When Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte was born in 1865, Nebraska was still a *territory* of the United States. Women could not vote and Native Americans were not considered citizens of the United States. As a female Native American of the Omaha Tribe, Susan did not have many rights. This did not stop her from going after her dreams and impacting her community.

2 When Susan was just eight years old, she watched a member of her tribe die at home. The doctor had been asked to come to the house four times. Each time the doctor failed to arrive. Susan would later write about this experience saying, "It was only an Indian and it did not matter. The doctor preferred hunting for prairie chickens rather than visiting poor, suffering humanity." This experience would leave a lasting impression on Susan and lead her to a career in medicine.

3 Susan's father was a strong supporter of education. He wanted Susan to learn about her heritage as an Omaha Indian, but he also wanted her to learn academics. He encouraged her to learn as much as possible. By the time she had graduated from Hampton University, Susan spoke four languages--English, French, and two Native American languages. She quoted scripture from the *Bible* and quotes from Shakespearian plays. She could paint and play the piano.

4 Susan still wanted to do more. She wanted to become a doctor. She went to the Women's

Medical College of Pennsylvania to study and became a doctor in 1889.

5 Susan returned to her reservation as a doctor. She was the only doctor for the 1,350 square mile reservation and had over 1,200 patients. Many of her patients suffered from diseases such as tuberculosis and cholera. Susan would make house calls on foot, horseback, and buggy.

6 Besides treating patients for illness and disease, Susan also worked to educate them. She told them how important it was to get fresh air and sunshine on a daily basis. She taught them the importance of proper hygiene and explained the importance of everyone having their own glass for drinking water. She also explained the need for screen doors to keep disease carrying flies out of homes.

7 In 1894, Susan married Henry Picotte. She set up a private practice in Bancroft, Nebraska. Her practice treated all patients--Native Americans, Blacks, and Whites.

8 Susan had long wanted to open a hospital on reservation land. She worked hard to get donations to build the hospital. Finally in 1913, a hospital opened in Walthill, Nebraska. The hospital served patients in the area until the 1940s when it was turned into a nursing home.

9 Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte had many health issues during her life. She died at the age of 50 from bone cancer.

Name: _____

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1. How did watching a member of her tribe die impact Susan's life?

2. What detail from the passage supports the statement below?

Susan's father believed that girls should get an education.

3. What was a challenge that Susan had as a doctor?

4. How did Susan improve the lives of Native Americans?
